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ABSTRACT

This paper briefly describes the author's dissertation research covering the history of women as visual and audiovisual educators (1920-1957), outlining her historical methodology and tracing sources for such research. The methodology used was a discourse analysis of selected audiovisual textbooks and audiotapes of founders in the audiovisual field. Because there is no standard methodology for a discourse analysis of historical audiovisual texts, working concepts of texts, reader, author, subjectivity, sex, and gender were drawn from a number of sources: social reader theories, critical feminism, and discourse as informed by post-structural concepts. Early audiovisual texts and oral history tapes were analyzed to determine the rhetorical direction the authors/founders took in shaping the knowledge base constituting audiovisual education and gender equity issues within the field. A prominent source of information for the research was the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) Archives, housed at the University of Maryland, College Park. Types of items found in the AECT Archives include: conference reports, audiovisual guides, software and hardware manuals, film catalogs, private correspondence to and from founders in the field, and reel-to-reel oral history tapes. (Contains 14 references.) (AEF)

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Women's History In Visual And Audiovisual Education, Where And How To Find It

by Rebecca P. Butler

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to (1) briefly describe dissertation research covering the history of women in visual and audiovisual education, 1920-1957; (2) convey the manner in which an historical methodology may be reached; and (3) trace sources for such research. Special emphasis is on where, how, and why visual literacy and educational technology historians can and should make use of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology Archives.

Introduction

Non-print media use in U.S. public schools began as early as 1905. It was during this year that St. Louis, Missouri, assistant school superintendent, Carl Rathmann purchased exhibits from the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition (World's Fair) for use with the school children of his city. Overwhelmed with sets of lantern slides, stereoscopic views, and realia, he created one of America's first audiovisual pioneers: Amelia Meissner, an elementary school teacher, when he placed her in charge of the collection (Golterman, 1976). From this inauspicious beginning, came visual education, audiovisual education, and educational technology. Another pioneering effort in the field occurred in 1923, when Anna Verona Dorris and eighteen others penned the first visual education textbook to be published in the United States: Visual Instruction: Course of Study for the Elementary Schools, Including the Kindergarten and First Six Grades. With this modest textbook, a variety of texts dealing with both visual and audio education began changing the way educators across the nation viewed instruction in K-12 schools and higher academia. Who were these women mentioned above? Why is it that most of us have never heard their names before? When we think of pioneers in audiovisual education, for what reasons do mostly male names come to mind? How and where can we find out more about both the male and female founders of our field?

Dissertation Research

After asking myself the above questions and more, I determined that the purpose of my dissertation research would be to document the creation of subjects within the dominant discourses of audiovisual education, 1920-1957, especially the role of United States' women during that time period. (I chose this specific set of dates because of its proximity to the beginnings of visual and audio education, as well as its closeness to some of the greatest growth periods in the history of the field: World War II[1] and Sputnik.[2]) As such, I reviewed representative samples of oral history tapes of founders in the field[3] and textbooks authored by various audiovisual pioneers to ascertain the manner in which these texts constructed their subjects (positioned their readers). I also assessed critically the discourses running through audiovisual education, 1920-1957; and defined the formation of men and women as subjects in the early texts and dominant organizations within the field. Studying the various histories in the context of the time in which they occurred, I established that the dominant perception of women in audiovisual education, 1920-1957, was that of helpmate to male audiovisual specialists, BUT alternative discourses with a more humanistic bent ran as sub-texts through much of this. These alternative discourses provided readers with choices -- they were invited to view the world in more equitable terms.

Historical Methodology

The most prominent type of historical methodology is descriptive history; a recording of past events (Gray, et al., 1964). However, such a traditional history does not always fit the subject matter or the research materials available.

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In such instances, it is necessary to develop alternative research strategies. Such is the case for my dissertation research: "Women in Audiovisual Education, 1920-1957: A Discourse Analysis."

There is no standard methodology for a discourse analysis of historical audiovisual texts. Therefore, working concepts of text, reader, author, subjectivity, sex, and gender were drawn from a number of sources: social reader theories ala Stanley Fish;[4] critical feminism via Judith Butler,[5] Maria Black and Rosalind Coward[6] and Sandra Harding;[7] and discourse as informed by post-structural concepts.[8] (These theoretical constructs have similar and non-competing epistemologies: belief in the social construction of knowledge and relationships.) Rhetorical findings were positioned, via discourse analysis, in the discourses which produced them. Thus, the methodology was a discourse analysis of selected audiovisual textbooks and audio-tapes of founders in the audiovisual field, 1920-1957.

Given this discourse analysis, I chose to analyze early audiovisual texts (textbooks and oral history audio tapes) to ascertain the rhetorical direction the authors/founders took in shaping the base of knowledge constituting audiovisual education and gender/sex equity issues within the field. I explored the authors' discourses to discover which ideas and concepts were included or excluded from their writings and conversations, examined how the authors spoke and with what authority, described the discourses they offer their readers, and discussed how these authors construct their readers/listeners through the discourses they use.

For the early audiovisual textbooks and manuals section, authors were selected if they were in more than one of a number of related areas, including: audiovisual professional periodicals (1920-1957); early audiovisual conference programs, proceedings, and publications; on AECT oral history tapes; and/or if referenced or quoted in more than one early audiovisual education textbook. Textbook sampling procedures included looking for the author's voice and tone in areas where I felt they would be most evident: prefaces and forwards (where authors often reveal why they wrote the text, thus revealing their voice); chapters one and two (which are introductory and lay foundations, also disclosing voice); and summaries and conclusions. After examining early textbooks and manuals, I turned to the oral histories.

Similar criteria to that used for the audiovisual textbooks and manuals discourse analysis decided which of the oral history tapes of visual, audiovisual, and educational technology founders would be analyzed. In total, twenty-three tapes were perused: twenty male and three female. These were studied to understand the construction of men and women in audiovisual education, 1920-1957, as positioned by the interviewed founders. This methodology ascertained the rhetorical direction the authors and founders took in shaping the base of knowledge constituting audiovisual education and gender and sex equity issues within the field during the first half of the twentieth century.

AECT Archives

Prominent in information provision for the above dissertation discussion are the AECT Archives, housed with the National Public Broadcasting Archives at the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland. Types of items currently found in the AECT Archives include: conference reports, audiovisual guides, software and hardware manuals, film catalogs, private correspondence to and from founders in the field, and reel-to-reel oral history tapes (Conners, 1996). The AECT Archives can be accessed by contacting: Thomas Connors, Curator, National Public Broadcasting Archives, Hornbake Library, University of Maryland at College Park, College Park, Maryland 20742. They are open to all those interested in historical research in the field(s) of visual literacy and educational technology.

Conclusion

Dissertation Research

The dissertation study, "Women in Audiovisual Education, 1920-1957: A Discourse Analysis," analyzed the creation of subjects within the dominant discourse of audiovisual education, 1920-1957, and the role of women in par-

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ticular. Authors' discourses were explored to uncover which ideas and concepts were included and/or excluded from their writings and conversations. Because there is no standard methodology for a discourse analysis of historical audiovisual texts, working concepts of text, reader, author, subjectivity, sex, and gender were drawn from a number of sources: social reader theories, critical feminism, and discourse as informed by post-structural concepts. In addition, rhetorical findings were positioned, via discourse analysis, in the discourses which produced them. This study established that the dominant perception of women in audiovisual education, 1920-1957, was that of helpmate to (male) audiovisual specialists. Factors which created and fed such a perception were the results of, among other things, the two world wars, the military establishment, the corporate world, and the federal government (for the most part, all patriarchal/male-dominated institutions). Although societal and cultural influences of the 1800s were changing in the first half of the twentieth century, societal perceptions still established that men were providers while women cared for home and family. However, within this environment, existed alternative discourses influenced by Edgar Dale, John Dewey, and the child-centered learning theory movement. These alternate discourses provided their readers with choices; they were invited to view the world in more equitable terms. Such perceptions, and the discourses influenced by them, affected how both sexes were viewed within audiovisual education, 1920-1957 (Butler, 1995).

AECT Archives

The Association for Educational Communications and Technology Archives materials' collection, ranging from oral history tapes to conference proceedings to the private correspondence of audiovisual education founders, provided a wide variety of resources instrumental to my dissertation research. For current and future visual literacy and educational technology historians, the AECT Archives represents a major information provision source.

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[1] During World War II, the field of audiovisual education boomed with the realization that training films were a quick and easy way to instruct thousands of men and women in both the armed forces and industry (Butler, 1995).

[2] Sputnik created a mass concern in the United States that Soviet technology had defeated the

American education system. The National Defense Education Act (NDEA), which provided monies to introduce audiovisual materials into the educational curriculum, was a direct result of Sputnik (Craver, 1986; Kliebard, 1987; National Defense Education act, 1958).

[3] These tapes came from two sources: Department of Audio Visual Instruction (DAVI) oral histories commissioned in the 1950s and Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) oral histories of DAVI and AECT pioneers taped in the 1970s. (Conners, 1996; Heinich, 1994).

[4] Stanley Fish's earlier works promote interpretive strategies -- a social reader theory which postulates that a community of readers may share textual interpretations based on discursive influences (Attridge, et al., 1987; DeVaney, 1994).

[5] Judith Butler theorizes that sex and gender are both social and cultural constructions and that these constructions are formed in discourse (Butler, 1993, p. 10).

[6] Black and Coward postulate that discourses create and cultivate the positioning of men and women in a society (Cameron, 1990, p. 124-132).

[7] Sandra Harding's feminist standpoint theory promotes knowledge as socially constructed and focuses on gender differences (Harding, 1991).

[8] Bove describes discourse as invisible systems of thought which operate at a linguistic level to produce and regulate knowledge. In addition, he argues that all communications are discourse specific (Bove, 1992).